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ABSTRACT

AUTOQUEST is a computer aid to independent study. It presents ordinary text to a student at a computer terminal, a paragraph at a time. Using a pattern-matching approach, the system generates a question based on one of the sentences of the text and grades the student's answer. If the student's answer does not match the words of the text, the paragraph is displayed again. Results showed that about 68 percent of the generated questions were satisfactory and that the errors were largely syntactic, indicating the need for a structural parser to preprocess the sentences. The economic feasibility of AUTOQUEST is discussed and judged to be good within 5 years. (Author)

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AN AID TO INDEPENDENT STUDY THROUGH AUTOMATIC QUESTION GENERATION (AUTOQUEST)

John H. Wolfe

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AUTOQUEST is a computer aid to independent study. It presents ordinary text to a student at a computer terminal, a paragraph at a time. Using a pattern-matching approach, the system generates a question based on one of the sentences of the text and grades the student's answer. If the student's answer does not match the words of the text, the paragraph is displayed again. Results showed that about 68% of the generated questions were satisfactory

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and that the errors were largely syntactic, indicating the need for a structural parser to preprocess the sentences. The economic feasibility of AUTOQUEST is discussed and judged to be good within 5 years.

FOREWORD

This research was supported under Exploratory Development Task Area PF55.522.002 (Methodology for Developing/Evaluating Navy Training Programs), Work Unit Number PF55.522.002.01.60 (Advanced Computer Based Research). This work is jointly funded by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (Account Symbol 9740400.1311) and the Navy Personnel Research and Development Center. It was initiated in response to the requirements for improvements in training methodologies, measurement techniques, management and administration, including decision criteria required for their rapid implementation (GOR 43, Rev 10/71).

The pedagogical value of inserted questions on learning from textual materials was demonstrated under the same work unit under contract number N61339-73-C-0078 with the University of Illinois.

J. J. CLARKIN
Commanding Officer

SUMMARY

Problem

It is important that naval training keep up with changing requirements. As new weapon systems are introduced, curricula must be revised, new manuals prepared, and instructors trained. Previously trained personnel often are expected to keep up with new developments by independent study of technical manuals, without formal training. Sophisticated instructional technology would be desirable but is seldom available. Programmed instruction and computer-assisted instruction require long lead times to develop. Some method is needed to assist personnel on the job in their independent study and review of technical materials.

Objective

The objective of the project was to improve the independent study of technical manuals and books by developing a kind of automatic CAI system called automatic question generation (AUTOQUEST) that does not require human frame-preparation. The system takes ordinary text and presents it to the student on a CRT device, a paragraph at a time. After the student studies the paragraph, he signals the computer that he is ready to be tested on it. The computer then generates a question to the student based on one of the sentences of the text. The student's answer is evaluated and, if incorrect, the paragraph is shown to the student again.

Approach

The approach to automatic question generation was entirely syntactic rather than semantic. That is, only the form of a sentence, not its meaning, influences the question generation. This method was chosen so that the system would have enough generality to work on any body of English text, regardless of subject matter. The program compares a selected text sentence against a table of pre-stored patterns. If the sentence fits a pattern, a certain kind of question is generated from it. If the sentence does not fit any pattern in the table, it is ignored.

Findings

About 68% of the generated questions were satisfactory, while the remaining ones were ungrammatical or inappropriate. Most of the errors were due to the inability of the pattern-matcher to utilize all of the syntactic information in the sentence.

Recommendations

It is suggested that further work with automatic question generation be continued when a satisfactory computer-based English parser with good error recovery becomes available to preprocess the text sentences. Improved parsers are under development by other research workers and

should be available in 1 or 2 years. The economic feasibility of this approach is discussed and is projected to be under one dollar per student-hour within 5 years when individual stand-alone minicomputers become available which are capable of running programs written in the LISP programming language.

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

It is important that naval training keep up with changing requirements. As new weapon systems are introduced, curricula must be revised, new manuals prepared, and instructors trained. Previously trained personnel often are expected to keep up with new developments by independent study of technical manuals, without formal training. Sophisticated instructional technology would be desirable but is seldom available. Programmed instruction and computer-assisted instruction require long lead times to develop. Some method is needed to assist personnel on the job in their independent study and review of technical materials.

Purpose

This report describes an experimental computer-based educational system called automatic question generation (AUTOQUEST) for assisting independent study of written text. Studies of reading comprehension have shown that retention of material is enhanced if the student is periodically required to answer questions about what he has read (Anderson & Biddle, 1975; Anderson et al., 1974; Alessi et al., 1974; Anderson et al., 1975a, 1975b). This principle has been employed in computer-managed instruction, but it requires considerable human effort to prepare the questions.

The goal of AUTOQUEST is to automatically generate questions from text in order to improve independent study of any textual material. The AUTOQUEST system presents text on a computer terminal to a student, a paragraph at a time, and asks him questions about it, based on a randomly selected sentence contained in the paragraph. If the student's answer contains a certain percentage of the words in the original sentence, the student is told his answer is correct and he goes on to the next paragraph. If the answer is judged wrong, the paragraph is displayed again and another question is generated.

The research was almost entirely directed toward the development of the techniques for generating questions. Issues of economy or efficiency of programs did not receive much attention. Nor was the project concerned with running subjects to determine the pedagogical effectiveness of the system when compared with unsupervised study or conventional CAI. The project was devoted toward determining the feasibility of automatically producing a man-machine dialogue by natural language processing techniques with minimal preprocessing of text by human beings.

Economics and Computer Technology

Since one of the motivations of this research is to save the cost of human-generated questions, it is appropriate to discuss the economic feasibility of AUTOQUEST. At present, it requires about 6 minutes of CPU time on a Digital Equipment PDP-10 per student-hour of instruction. This works out to about $40 per student-hour, not including telephone charges and computer terminal costs. The prospects for reducing the cost are discussed below.

The future of CAI seems to be in providing each student with small individual computers. One such system, which has been announced within the last 6 months, consists of a small computer with 32,796 bytes of core memory, a flexible disk drive containing 1/4 million bytes, a CRT terminal, and a hardcopy printer, all at a purchase price of $7900. Costs per student-hour are estimated to be under one dollar. AUTOQUEST is programmed in the computer language LISP, which is not yet available on such computers, but work is now underway to develop a microcoded version of LISP for small computers. Thus, we envision AUTOQUEST running on a small computer within 3 years. The initial price of this computer will be about $50,000, but will eventually decline to under $10,000 (Horn and Winston, 1975).

Video disk technology will have a significant impact on the economics of CAI. Within a year, video disk players for the home entertainment market will be available at prices near $600 (Walker, 1975). Each video disk will hold from 30 to 60 minutes of television, containing as much as 100,000 still frames. If video disks could be adapted to digital text storage, several hundred books could be randomly accessed within a single disk costing less than $10. If this kind of disk player were connected to a computer, the student would have an information retrieval system capable of rapidly finding information contained in his library. An automated tutorial program like AUTOQUEST could be added at very low marginal cost.

Background

The field of natural language processing by computers is too large to be reviewed fully here. An excellent recent review by Walker is available (Walker, 1973). However, I would like to describe briefly the papers which have particularly influenced the present study. After several years of relative inactivity, natural language processing took quite an upsurge with the publication of Woods' Lunar Information System (Woods et al., 1972) and Winograd's SHRDLU robot (Winograd, 1972). Woods' system uses a transition network, in which a link is associated with an attempt to find a particular type of phrase or word in order to transform a sentence (usually a question) into its "deep structure" set of simple active sentences. A semantic interpreter processes the deep structure and produces an information retrieval program for answering the question. The generated program searches a data base (originally having to do with lunar rocks) and answers are returned to the questioner. Winograd's system is characterized by a sophisticated interaction between a systemic grammatical parser and a procedural semantic interpreter. The system allows a user to interrogate the computer about a world of colored blocks and pyramids and to program the computer to carry out instructions to move blocks into specified places. Of the two systems, Winograd's is generally conceded to be more powerful, while Woods' is thought to have greater generality. Both systems have inspired a number of successors.

There has been a resurgence of interest in machine translation (Wilks, 1973) and case-frame representations of meaning (Schank and Colby, 1973). The case-frame approach was used by Simmons and Smith (1974) in a project closely related to the present one in its purpose. The investigators

showed how questions could be generated from text once the text had been converted to a deep case-frame representation. Unfortunately, they found that no existing or projected computer program could produce the case representations from unrestricted text, so that human preprocessing of text was required for their question-generator to work. Hopefully, a computer program will someday be developed to replace the human editing presently required by this system.

One of the first approaches to natural language processing was Weizenbaum's Eliza program (Weizenbaum, 1966), in which the computer simulated a nondirective psychotherapist. The program uses pattern matching keyed to certain words in the patient's conversation with no real understanding of the content. For example, if the patient said, "I am very unhappy these days," the computer would notice the words "I am" and generate "How long have you...," followed by the remainder of the patient's statement so as to produce the question, "How long have you been very unhappy these days?" A more sophisticated pattern-matching system to simulated paranoia was developed by the psychiatrist Colby (Colby, Parkinson, and Frought, 1974). For reasons to be described later in this report, the pattern-matching approach is the one used by the AUTOQUEST system.

APPROACH

The approach to automatic question generation was entirely syntactic rather than semantic. That is, only the form of a sentence is treated, not its meaning. In this manner, a general system could be developed which would work on any body of English text, regardless of subject matter. If a semantic approach had been employed, the project would have been restricted to one or two specialized subjects and a great amount of effort would have been spent in developing semantic models for those subjects.

A pure syntactic approach has many limitations, of course. First, the student is required to give verbatim parts of the original text in his answers. Second, it is well known that many English sentences are syntactically ambiguous and can only be parsed correctly when their meaning is taken into account. It was our hope (justified later by our results) that these problems would not occur so frequently that a useful system would be infeasible.

The project's first attempt at syntactic question generation was a two-stage process in which a text sentence was put through a parser and the parsed sentence reassembled into the form of a question. For the parsing, we used a version of Woods' Augmented Transition Network Parser which was available on a computer at the University of California (UC) at Irvine. It was a slightly scaled-down version of his experimental Lunar Sciences Natural Language system with the so-called NASA grammar. The system is one of the most successful natural-language programs ever developed. It proved to be extremely useful in helping geologists retrieve information about lunar rocks. Unfortunately, a number of problems were encountered in adapting it to this work. The parsing program occupied so much computer memory that it could only be run after midnight at UC Irvine. Further, 50% of the text sentences failed to parse and gave error messages indicating they needed more memory. Of the remaining 50% parsed sentences, only 60% appeared to have been parsed correctly. As a check, one of the sentences that failed at UC Irvine was run at Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, Inc. (BBN) with the original version of the parser. The program ground away for over an hour before returning a message that space requirements had been exceeded.

This experience was sufficiently discouraging that it was decided not to try to adapt any existing general-purpose parser to this project. Instead, the decision was made to develop a specialized pattern-matching program that compares a sentence against a table of pre-stored patterns. If the sentence fits a pattern, a certain kind of question is generated from it. If the sentence does not fit any pattern in the table, it is ignored.

The following sentence, taken from a computer programming manual, helps to illustrate the process: "The dd name identifies a DD statement so that subsequent control statements and the data control block in the processing program can refer to it." The sentence matches a pre-stored pattern in the program of the form: "S_1 so that S_2."

The first part of the sentence, S_1, is scanned to locate the verb. If the first verb found is an auxiliary, such as "is," "was," "were," "do," etc., it is moved to the front of S_1. Otherwise, the tense and number of the verb are examined and an appropriate auxiliary created at the front of S_1. The transformed S_1 is called QFORM(S_1). The generated question is: "Why QFORM (S_1)?" The computer also generates an expected answer: "So that S_2." Applying these rules to the text example, we get the question, "Why does the dd name identify a DD statement?" with the expected answer, "So that subsequent control statements and the data control block in the processing program can refer to it."

The student's answer is checked to see if more than 50% of the long words (more than 4 letters) of the expected answer are contained in his answer. In this example, he has to come up with at least four of the words in the list (subsequent control statements block processing program) in order to have his answer judged correct. The 50% criterion allows the student some flexibility beyond a complete verbatim requirement. The restriction to long words was designed to eliminate common English words and increase the percentage of content-specific words.

If the expected answer contains a conjunction, such as "and" or "or," then the student's answer will be judged partly right if it is correct for part of the answer on either side of the conjunction. For example, if the student replied, "So that subsequent control statements can refer to it," the computer would come back saying, "Yes, subsequent control statements and the data control block in the processing program can refer to it. Your answer is partly right."

DESCRIPTION OF METHODS

The Question Generation Algorithms

Vocabulary. The program uses a dictionary of articles, prounouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and about 16,000 verb stems. A morphological analysis subroutine strips off the endings of a word such as -ing, -s, -ed, -es and tests if the remainder of the word is in the verb list. The verbs are classified as transitive or intransitive, regular or irregular, and verb, verb-noun, verb-adjective, or verb-adjective-noun. For example, the word "control" is a verb-noun since it can be used either as a verb or as a noun; it is also transitive and regular. The word "bring" is always a transitive irregular verb.

A list of common adverbs also appears in the vocabulary. In addition, words ending in -ly which had not been assigned another part of speech were classified as adverbs.

Since nouns can modify nouns, as in the phrase, "job control language," no distinction was made between adjectives and nouns in the lexicon. Any words which were not in the vocabulary were automatically classified as nouns whenever they appeared in a sentence.

Pattern-matching (QGENR). Given a sentence in the form of a list, QGENR tries to generate a question from it and an expected answer. QGENR consists of three parts: (1) a preprocessor, (2) a pattern-matcher, and (3) a post-processing filter.

Preprocessing Stage. If the first word of the sentence says "Goodbye," "Quit," etc., then return, "I have enjoyed working with you. Goodbye."

If the sentence contains a colon, reject it. (Sentences with colons were often found to contain subsentences or complex phrases which the pattern matchers could not easily handle.)

If the sentence has more than 35 words, reject it. The figure "35" was arbitrarily chosen in order to eliminate the most complex and unwieldly sentences while permitting a fair number of sentences to remain for further processing.

If there are less than four words preceding a comma, which include a preposition or filler word like "nevertheless," "however," etc., strip them off the beginning of the sentence.

If the sentence begins with a comma or filler word, strip it off.

Mark all the words ending in -ly as adverbs.

Apply the function SETNOUN to every word in the sentence. This function first tries to see if the word is already in the vocabulary or

is a verb form of a known verb. If so, it is marked as such; otherwise, it is marked as a noun.

If the first word in the sentence is a verb, the sentence is rejected.

The sentence is scanned for two verbs with the same tense and person connected by the word "and." If found, all the words are deleted starting with the first verb up to and including the "and."

The word preceding the verb is marked as a noun. Then the subroutine CHECKVERBS is executed to mark excess verb forms as nouns.

Pattern-matching Question Formation Stage. A list of patterns was developed by generalizing from the sentence features which I found myself using when I generated questions from text. Each pattern seemed to be associated with a particular rule for generating a question. The list of patterns is not claimed to be complete, optimal, or always correct.

The program checks the patterns given in Table 1 in sequence until a pattern is found which matches the sentence. Then the corresponding questions and answers are generated. Although the table does not show adverbs, they may optionally appear next to verbs in the sentence patterns. The program first checks to see if any subordinate conjunctions occur. If they do, only the first set of patterns in the table is handled. The question is generated from the main part of the sentence and the subordinate clause is appended to the end of the question.

TABLE 1

Question-Generating Patterns

No.	Sentence Pattern	Question	Answer
A	$\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Prep}\\ \text{Subord}\end{matrix}\right.$ + X +, + Y + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}\\ \text{Aux}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Z or Y + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}\\ \text{Aux}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Z + Subord + X	Case 1: X = nil or You & Tense = present What should you do + Subord + X?	$\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}\\ \text{Aux}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Z
		Case 2: Verb is intransitive What $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{happens}\\ \text{happened}\end{matrix}\right.$ with + Y + Subord + X?	Verb + Z
		Case 3: First word of Z ≠ Verb, Aux, or "not" What QForm (X + Verb) + Subord + Y?	Z
		Case 4: None of the above What $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{happens}\\ \text{happened}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Subord + X?	Z
B	X + as + Y + as + Z	How + Y + QForm (X)?	Z
C	X + as + Y	How + QForm (X)?	Z
D	X + So That + Y	Why + QForm (X)?	Y
E	X + (Be) Used to + Verb + Y	What + (Be) + X + Used for?	to + Verb + Y
F	X + (Be) + NP + *Y	What + QForm (X + (Be))?	NP + *Y
G	X + To + Verb + Y	What + QForm (X) + to do?	Verb + Y
H	X + Noun + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Prep + Y}\\ \text{nil}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Relative + *Y + Verb_2 + Z + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}_1\\ \text{Aux}_1\end{matrix}\right.$ + *W	What + noun + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}_1\\ \text{Aux}_1\end{matrix}\right.$ + *W	*Y + Y + *X + Verb_2 + Z
I	X + Verb + Prep + Y	$\left[\begin{matrix}\text{Where}\\ \text{Whom}\\ \text{What}\end{matrix}\right.$ + QForm (X + Verb) + $\left[\begin{matrix}\text{Nil}\\ \text{Nil}\\ \text{Prep}\end{matrix}\right.$?	Y
J	*Y + Noun + Prep + Y + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}\\ \text{Aux}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Z Where Prep ≠ of and Y contains no verbs	What + Noun + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}\\ \text{Aux}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Z?	*Y + Y
K	Y + Noun + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}\\ \text{Aux}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Z Where Y ≠ Det and Y does not contain prepositions, coordinate conjunctions, or verbs	What kind of + noun + $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Verb}\\ \text{Aux}\end{matrix}\right.$ + Z?	Y
L	X + That + Y	What + QForm (X)?	Y
M	Y + Verb + X and tense = past or present	Case 1: Y contains pronouns What + QForm (Y + Verb)?	X
		Case 2: Y contains no pronouns What + Verb + X?	Y

NOTATIONS:

* in front of a variable indicates it is optional and may be omitted.

{ indicates alternative forms.

(Be) indicates any form of the verb "to be."

[[indicates corresponding alternatives

Aux = auxiliary = can, should, would, had, is, does, etc.

Subord = subordinate conjunction = although, because, besides, if, unless, whereas, while, until, when, whenever.

Det = determiner = a, an, the.

Prep = preposition.

QForm = a function which performs subject-verb inversion.

Some comments on the patterns are in order. Pattern D really only works where the verb in Y is subjunctive. Pattern B could probably be eliminated, since G also generates a sensible question for infinitive verb complements. F is an attempt to handle passive voice. H, J, K, and M 2 are all questions about the subject of the sentence which ask for the adjectives, prepositional phrases, or relative clauses which modify the principal noun in the subject noun phase. Pattern I asks for the prepositional phrase which modifies the main verb (which must be passive or intransitive).

Pattern L works only when the "that" clause follows the main verb of the sentence and is the object of it, as in "the investigation showed that..." Pattern I asks for the object of the verb when the subject contains certain pronouns because to ask for the subject would be to invite a trivial answer.

Post-processing Stage. In order to screen out questions and answers which are likely to be of poor quality, several post-processing filters are applied to the generated question-answer pairs. The filters were somewhat arbitrary rules designed to eliminate the most complex questions and answers.

The program rejects the Q-A pair if any of the following conditions are true:

1. Either the question or answer is longer than 17 words.

2. The word "and" appears in the question.

3. The first word of the answer is a relative pronoun or subordinate conjunction.

4. Certain pronouns appear in the question.

5. Certain pronouns appear in the answer and the answer has less than five words.

6. There is a comma in the question.

7. An error was encountered previously in the subject-verb inversion routine QFORM.

Finding the Verbs in the Sentence (CHECKVERBS). Possible verbs are separated from verbal forms used as nouns by the following process:

1. If a "verb" is immediately preceded by a determiner, it is marked as a noun.

2. If a "verb" immediately precedes another verb and the first verb is not a copula, it is marked as a noun.

3. A verb following an auxiliary, or an auxiliary plus an adverb, is retained.

4. A verb following the word "to" and possibly preceded by an adverb is retained.

5. A verb following some form of "be" or "have" and possibly preceded by an adverb is retained as a verb.

The number of remaining verbs is counted and compared with the number of relatives and subordinate conjunctions in the sentence plus one. If the difference is zero, the program returns the sentence as a success. If it is less than zero, the sentence is rejected as hopeless. If it is greater than zero, the remaining verbs are scanned from right to left. Present tense verbs which could be adjectives or nouns are marked as nouns until the number of excess verbs is reduced to zero if possible. If necessary, past tense forms are then marked as nouns until the number of excess verbs is reduced to zero.

Subject-verb Inversion (QFORM). QFORM performs subject-verb inversion according to the following rules:

1. If there are any conjunctions in the sentence, take the QFORM of the first part of the sentence and append the part with conjunctions.

2. If there is an auxiliary in the sentence, move it to the front of the sentence, and return. Look for a third person singular present tense verb. Replace it by infinitive forms and put "does" at the beginning of the sentence and return.

3. Look for a present tense verb and, if found, put the word "do" at the beginning of the sentence and return.

4. Look for a past tense verb and, if found, put the word "did" at the beginning of the sentence and return.

5. If none of the above work, set the global variable QFORMERROR, which signals failure to the system.

Paragraph Recognition

The input-output routines for AUTOQUEST turn out to be extremely complex and require nearly 50% of the processing time. The difficulty lies in recognizing exactly what a paragraph is. Usually the first word of a paragraph is indented, but sometimes it is not. If a paragraph is indented, this fact must be distinguished from the indentions of every line which are associated with margins. Some paragraphs are identified by letters or numbers preceding the first word. On the other hand, we do not want to treat a table of contents as if it were a paragraph. Some paragraphs are recognizable by an extra blank line between paragraphs, but the recognition algorithm must allow for double- or multiple-line

spacing. Section headings or titles should not be treated as sentences. Copyright notices and similar paraphanelia are not good candidates for instruction and need to be screened out automatically.

Various heuristics have been devised to screen out noise from the text which should be processed. For example, a table of contents can usually be recognized by embedded blanks or periods in the middle of the line. Titles are usually eliminated by screening out "sentences" of less than five words.

The program stores each paragraph it reads in two forms: (1) as a list of sentences and (2) as a string of characters. Before generating a question, the program presents the paragraph to the student as a string, exactly as it was read. Then a sentence is randomly selected from the paragraph list. If it has already been used for a question, it may be rejected and a new sentence selected. The QGENR routine is executed to produce a question-answer pair.

RESULTS

The AUTOQUEST program was tested on a set of abstracts of technical reports from the Stanford University Artificial Intelligence Laboratory and on a page of text from an IBM programmer's manual. An example of a study session using AUTOQUEST appears in the appendix and illustrates both successful and unsuccessful interactions.

Of the 50 generated questions, 34 were judged to be satisfactory. The 16 unsatisfactory questions were classified into four groups: (1) eleven syntactic errors, (2) three semantic errors, (3) one pedagogical error, and (4) and one program bug. The syntactic and semantic errors are listed in full in Tables 2 and 3. The program bug was one in which the value DET was replaced by NOUN on the property list for the word "the," causing the program to generate a question in which the answer was the single word "the." The one error classified as pedagogical was the question, "What do we describe?," which could have been answered by two different sentences in the same paragraph.

TABLE 2

Examples of Syntactic Errors with Autoquest

1.	SENTENCE:	There are two usual characterizations of the least fixed-point of a continuous function.
	QUESTION:	What are two usual characterizations of the least fixed-point of a continuous function?
2.	SENTENCE:	We present two different first order axiomizations of the metamathematics of the logic which FOL itself checks and show several proofs using each one.
	QUESTION:	What kind of proofs using each one?
3.	SENTENCE:	"On Automating the Construction of Programs" 65 pages, May 1974.
	QUESTION:	What May 1974?
4.	SENTENCE:	Methods are induced to detect some types of unmatchable target areas in the original data and for detecting when a supposed match in invalid.
	QUESTION:	What happens with methods when a supposed match is invalid?
5.	SENTENCE:	Input to the memory has the form of analyzed conceptual dependency graphs which represent the underlying meaning of language utterances.
	QUESTION:	What input meaning of language utterances?
6.	SENTENCE:	Then it looks at these lines and eliminates lines which cannot match any of the model lines.
	QUESTION:	What cannot it eliminates lines which match?
7.	SENTENCE:	The method, embodied in a computer program, generates a complete list of isomers.
	QUESTION:	What embodied generates a complete list of isomers?
8.	SENTENCE:	The program has the ability to create, destroy, and even resurrect objects in its world.
	QUESTION:	What does the even resurrect object in?
9.	SENTENCE:	This progress report covers the first year and one half of work by our automatic programming research group at the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory.
	QUESTION:	What work programming research group at the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory?
10.	SENTENCE:	The user retains control at all times.
	QUESTION:	Where does the user retains control?
11.	SENTENCE:	COPILOT uses the multiple processing facilities to its advantage to achieve a kind of interactive control which we have termed < non-preemptive >.
	QUESTION:	What does COPILOT uses the multiple process facilities to its advantage to do?

TABLE 3

Examples of Semantic Errors with AUTOQUEST

1.	SENTENCE:	The primary goal of comprehension is always to find meanings as soon as possible.
	QUESTION:	How soon is the primary goal of comprehension always to find meanings?
2.	SENTENCE:	Although FACT uses substantially more main memory than MACRO-10, it assembles typical programs about five times faster.
	QUESTION:	What does it assemble although FACT uses substantially more main memory than MACRO-10?
3.	SENTENCE:	The program is reproduced in full.
	QUESTION:	What is the program reproduced in?

The semantic errors seem to involve generating questions which imply a concrete answer where the source sentences involve abstract or idiomatic answers. Perhaps a simple addition of semantic markers (abstract-concrete, human-nonhuman, etc.) would prevent most such errors.

Nearly 69% of the errors were syntactic. By far the most common error was misidentification of the verb in the sentence. The source sentences are not themselves syntactically ambiguous. The problem seems to be that the pattern-matcher throws away most of the syntactic information in the sentence which a complete parser would utilize.

A second type of syntactic error, illustrated by sentences 4 and 6 in Table 2, is to mistake the level of a subordinate clause. For example, the when clause in sentence 4 is assumed to modify "included," but actually modifies "detecting." The pattern-matching approach is insensitive to levels of sentence embedding.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The pattern-matching system works best on relatively simple sentences. It assumes that the verb which it finds is the main verb of the sentence, not part of some embedded sentence. The relative clauses, prepositional phrases, infinitive verb complements, and subordinate clauses which it is asking for must modify constituents of the top level of the sentence and not embedded sentences.

The system would work much better if a reliable parser could be found to serve as the front-end of the pattern matcher. It would not be necessary to parse the sentences down to the lowest level. All that is required is that the parser correctly identify the top level constituents of the sentence. A satisfactory parser for our purposes must have the following properties:

1. It must have complete error recovery capabilities.

2. It must be able to identify the top level constituents of the sentence.

3. It must be able to flag cases of multiple parsings if they occur at the top level.

4. It must be able to determine the grammatical category of unknown words from their usage.

The most important requirement is error recovery. It is not necessary for the parser to work all the time, provided we know when it is not working.

Since questions need to be generated only once or twice per paragraph, a great many sentences can be rejected if the parser encounters an error or ambiguity in them. About the worst thing a parser can do is generate a system diagnostic which forces a break. The next worst thing it can do is pretend it has not encountered an error.

There is some reason to hope that a reliable parser meeting the above specifications will be available in about 2 years, in which case some very simple modifications to the AUTOQUEST system will improve its performance. For example, Kaplan and Kay have been working on a general syntactic processor which handles syntactic ambiguity in an economical format (Kaplan, 1973), and Burton (personal communication) has done some preliminary work on a grammar compiler which runs the NASA grammar about ten times faster than Woods' original system and which has improved debugging facilities (Burton, 1975).

For the near future, these parsers will have to operate with grammars that are capable of describing only 30 to 50% of English text sentences. Very little effort or funding is being expended on developing more complete computerized grammars of English.

The results with the present version of the system are sufficiently encouraging, however, so that a test of the pedagogical effectiveness of AUTOQUEST could and should be carried out in the future.

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APPENDIX

Sample AUTOQUEST Dialogue

```
<gsp>quest


AUTOQUEST - AN AID TO INDEPENDENT STUDY.

TO BEGIN, TYPE  (STUDY)

   2-JUN-75 ...


Good evening.
_(study)


WELCOME TO AUTOQUEST- AN AUTOMATIC STUDY AID.
WOULD YOU LIKE SOME INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO USE THE SYSTEM? yes

            AUTOQUEST

 AUTOMATIC QUESTION GENERATION AND RESPONSE EVALUATION

   AUTOQUEST IS DESIGNED AS AN AID TO INDEPENDENT STUDY. IT WILL
DISPLAY ANY DISK FILE, A PARAGRAPH AT A TIME, AND ASK YOU QUESTIONS
ABOUT IT. AUTOQUEST REQUIRES THAT YOUR ANSWER MATCH WORD FOR WORD
WHAT IS IN THE TEXT YOU HAVE READ. EACH ANSWER YOU TYPE SHOULD BE
FOLLOWED BY A PERIOD. (IF THE ANSWER ENDS IN A NUMBER, FOLLOW IT
WITH A SPACE AND THEN A PERIOD.) DON'T USE PARENTHESES IN ANYTHING
YOU TYPE. WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED WITH YOUR STUDY, TYPE GOODBYE.
   OCCASIONALLY, AUTOQUEST WILL ASK A QUESTION THAT DOESN'T MAKE
SENSE. IN THAT CASE, JUST TYPE "SKIP." AND IT WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER
QUESTION.
   GOOD LUCK!


END OF FILE
<WOLFE>INTRO.;7

WHAT FILE WOULD YOU LIKE TO STUDY? <gsp>aim2!!
```

*AIM-211, CS-383, AD769673,
Yorick Wilks,
"Natural Language Inference"
24 pages, September 1973.

The paper describes the way in which a Preference Semantics system for natural language analysis and generation tackles a difficult class of anaphoric inference problems (finding th correct referent for an English pronoun in context): those requiring either analytic (conceptual) knowledge of a complex sort, or requiring weak inductive knowledge of the course of events in the real world. The method employed converts all available knowledge to a canonical template form and endeavors to create chains of non-deductive inferences from the unknowns to the possible referents. Its method of selecting among possible chains of inferences is consistent with the overall principle of 'semantic preference' used to set up the original meaning representation, of which these anaphoric inference procedures are a manipulation.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? sure

WHAT DOES THE METHOD EMPLOYED ENDEAVOR TO DO?
create chains of non_deductive inferences from the unknowns

to the possible referents.

CORRECT

AIM-212, CS-384, AD769379,
Annette Herskovits,
"The Generation of French from a Semantic Representation"
20 pages, September 1973.

The report contains first a brief description of Preference Semantics, a system of representation and analysis of the meaning structure of natural language. The analysis algorithm which transforms phrases into semantic items called templates has been considered in detail elsewhere, so this report concentrates on the second phase of analysis, which binds templates together into a higher level semantic block corresponding to an English paragraph, and which, in operation, interlocks with the French generation procedure. During this phase, the semantic relations between templates are extracted, pronouns are referred and those word disambiguations are done that require the context of a whole paragraph. These tasks require items called <paraplates> which are attached to keywords such as prepositions, subjunctions and relative pronouns. The system chooses the representation which maximizes a carefully defined 'semantic density'.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? ok

WHAT CHOOSES THE REPRESENTATION WHICH MAXIMIZES A CAREFULLY DEFINED ' SEMANTIC DENSITY' ?
the author of the report.
WRONG-- SYSTEM / TRY AGAIN

The report contains first a brief description of Preference Semantics, a system of representation and analysis of the meaning structure of natural language. The analysis algorithm which transforms phrases into semantic items called templates has been considered in detail elsewhere, so this report concentrates on the second phase of analysis, which binds templates together into a higher level semantic block corresponding to an English paragraph, and which, in operation, interlocks with the French generation procedure. During this phase, the semantic relations between templates are extracted, pronouns are referred and those word disambiguations are done that require the context of a whole paragraph. These tasks require items called <paraplates> which are attached to keywords such as prepositions, subjunctions and relative pronouns. The system chooses the representation which maximizes a carefully defined 'semantic density'.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? y

WHAT CHOOSES THE REPRESENTATION WHICH MAXIMIZES A CAREFULLY DEFINED ' SEMANTIC DENSITY' ?
the system.
CORRECT

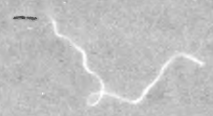
A system for the generation of French sentences is described, based on the generation of French sentences is described, based on the recursive evaluation of procedural generation patterns called <stereotypes>. The stereotypes are semantically context sensitive, are attached to each sense of English words and keywords and are carried into the representation by the analysis procedure. The representation of the meaning of words, and the versatility of the stereotype format, allow for fine meaning distinctions to appear in the French, and for the construction of French differing radically from the English origin.

AIM-213, CS-385,,
Ravindra B. Thosar,
"Recognition of Continuous Speech: Segmentation and Classification using Signature Table Adaptation"
37 pages, September 1973.

This report explores the possibility of using a set of features for segmentation and recognition of continuous speech. The features are not necessarily <distinctive> or minimal, in the sense that they do not divide the phonemes into mutually exclusive subsets, and can have high redundancy. This concept of feature can thus avoid apriori binding between the phoneme categories to be recognized and the set of features defined in a particular system.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? yes

WHAT CAN THE FEATURES HAVE ?
high redundancy.
CORRECT



An adaptive technique is used to find the probability of the presence of a feature. Each feature is treated independently of other features. An unknown utterance is thus represented by a feature graph with associated probabilities. It is hoped that such a representation would be valuable for a hypothesize-test paradigm as opposed to a one which operates on a linear symbolic input.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? yes

WHAT IS EACH FEATURE TREATED INDEPENDENTLY OF ?
other features.
CORRECT

AIM-214, CS-386, AD767332,
Walter A. Perkins, Thomas O. Binford,
"A Corner Finder for Visual Feedback"
59 pages, September 1973.

In visual-feedback work often a model of an object and its approximate location are known and it is only necessary to determine its location and orientation more accurately. The purpose of the program described herein is to provide such information for the case in which the model is an edge or corner. Given a model of a line or a corner with two or three edges, the program searches a TV window of arbitrary size looking for one or all corners which match the model. A model-driven program directs the search. It calls on another program to find all lines inside the window. Then it looks at these lines and eliminates lines which cannot match any of the model lines. It next calls on a program to form vertices and then checks for a matching vertex. If this simple procedure fails, the model-driver has two backup procedures. First it works with the lines that it has and tries to form a matching vertex (corner). If this fails, it matches parts of the model with vertices and lines that are present and then takes a careful look in a small region in which it expects to find a missing line. The program often finds weak contrast edges in this manner. Lines are found by a global method after the entire window has been scanned with the Hueckel edge operator.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? sure.

WHAT KIND OF - DRIVEN PROGRAM DIRECTS THE SEARCH ?
a model_driven one.
WRONG— MODEL / TRY AGAIN

In visual-feedback work often a model of an object and its approximate location are known and it is only necessary to determine its location and orientation more accurately. The purpose of the program described herein is to provide such information for the case in which the model is an edge or corner. Given a model of a line or a corner with two or three edges, the program searches a TV window of arbitrary size looking for one or all corners which match the model. A model-driven program directs the search. It calls on another program to find all lines inside the window. Then it looks at these lines and eliminates lines which cannot match any of the model lines. It next calls on a program to form vertices and then checks for a matching vertex. If this simple procedure fails, the model-driver has two backup procedures. First it works with the lines that it has and tries to form a matching vertex (corner). If this fails, it matches parts of the model with vertices and lines that are present and then takes a careful look in a small region in which it expects to find a missing line. The program often finds weak contrast edges in this manner. Lines are found by a global method after the entire window has been scanned with the Hueckel edge operator.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? yes

WHAT KIND OF - DRIVEN PROGRAM DIRECTS THE SEARCH ?
a model driven one.
CORRECT

*AIM-215, CS-387, AD769380,
Bruce G. Buchanan, N. S. Sridharan,
"Analysis of Behavior of Chemical Molecules: Rule Formation on
Non-homogeneous Classes of Objects"
15 pages, September 1973.

An information processing model of some important aspects of inductive reasoning is presented within the context of one scientific discipline. Given a collection of experimental (mass spectrometry) data from several chemical molecules the computer program described here separates the molecules into <well-behaved> subclasses and selects from the space of all explanatory processes the <characteristic> processes for each subclass. The definitions of <well-behaved> and <characteristic> embody several heuristics which are discussed. Some results of the program are discussed which have been useful to chemists and which lend credibility to this approach.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? y

WHAT IS AN INFORMATION PROCESSING MODEL OF SOME IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF INDUCTIVE REASONING PRESENTED WITHIN ?
the context of one scientific discipline.
CORRECT

*AIM-216, CS-389, AD771299,
Larry Masinter, N.S. Sridharan, J. Lederberg, S. H. Smith,
"Applications of Artificial Intelligence for Chemical Inference:
XII. Exhaustive Generation of Cyclic and Acyclic Isomers"
60 pages, September 1973.

A systematic method of identification of all possible graph isomers consistent with a given empirical formula is described. The method, embodied in a computer program, generates a complete list of isomers. Duplicate structures are avoided prospectively.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? yes

WHAT EMBODIED GENERATES A COMPLETE LIST OF ISOMERS ?
skip.
WE WILL SKIP THAT QUESTION

A systematic method of identification of all possible graph isomers consistent with a given empirical formula is described. The method, embodied in a computer program, generates a complete list of isomers. Duplicate structures are avoided prospectively.

ARE YOU READY TO ANSWER A QUESTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE JUST READ? y

WHAT IS DESCRIBED ?
a systematic method of identification of all possible graph isomers for the same empirical formula.
CORRECT

*AIM-217, CS-391, AD770610,
N. S. Sridharan,
"Search Strategies for the Task of Organic Chemical Synthesis"
32 pages, August 1973.

END OF FILE
<GSP>AIM211.;1

A computer program has been written that successfully discovers syntheses for complex organic chemical molecules. The definition of the search space and strategies for heuristic search are described in this paper.

FINISHED
-

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